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VISIT OF
HIS EXCELLENCY GENERAL SEYNI KOUNTCHE
PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL
CHIEF OF STATE OF THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER

AT

* [MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY]
DECEMBER 13, 1984

WELCOMING REMARKS

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Dear Friends:

Let me tell you a few words about our distinguished guest, General Seyni Kountche, President of the Supreme Military Council, the Chief of State of the Republic of Niger. For standard of excellence by which leaders of nations are measured, President Kountche stands out as one of the most respected statesmen of Africa. Since he assumed the Presidency in 1974 amidst the disastrous Sahelian drought, President Seyni Kountche has worked diligently to ensure that no Nigerian would

WELCOMING REMARKS

by

Dr. James D. McComas
President--Mississippi State University

Mr. President:

First permit me to express my high respect and deep gratitude to your Excellency for accepting our invitation. We are honored that in the midst of your extremely heavy schedule you could find time to visit our Institution and meet with our students and faculty and the many friends of Mississippi State University present here today. It is a special honor and a distinct privilege to welcome your party: Col. Moumouni Djermakoye Adamou, Excellencies M. Daouda Diallo, Dr. Ari Toubou Ibrahim, M. Ide Oumarou, M. Sani Bako, and Joseph Diatta. A special greeting to my dear colleague from the University of Niamey, Rector Abdou Hamani. Last but not least, I wish to extend my warmest welcome to our State Department representatives; the Honorable Frank G. Wisner, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State; the Honorable William R. Casey Jr., our Ambassador to Niger and the rest of the U.S. party.

Dear friends:

Let me tell you a few words about our distinguished guest, General Seyni Kountché, President of the Supreme Military Council, the Chief of State of the Republic of Niger. For standard of excellence by which leaders of nations are measured, President Kountché stands out as one of the most respected statesmen of Africa. Since he assumed the Presidency in 1974 amidst the disastrous Sahelian drought, President Seyni Kountche has worked diligently to ensure that no Nigerian would

ever suffer from hunger. He has sponsored pioneering research and development efforts aimed at increasing food production in order to achieve food self-sufficiency for his people. He is highly regarded as a statesman among the leaders of Africa. He has led his nation with dignity and independence in his efforts to develop the economy of Niger and improve the life conditions and future opportunities of his people.

Mr. President:

We hope very much that during your visit to our University you will have the opportunity to learn first hand about our similar commitment to help our young people realize their full potential and to prepare them for meaningful and productive lives.

With these opening thoughts in mind, it is my distinct honor to declare this convocation in session.

And now, Mr. President, I invite you to address the students and faculty of Mississippi State University.

ADDRESS TO THE ACADEMIC CONVOCATION

by

His Excellency

General Seyni Kountché

President of the Supreme Military Council

Chief of State of the Republic of Niger

Mr. President of Mississippi State University, honorable members of the faculty, honorable professors, distinguished students, ladies and gentlemen:

My delegation and I are very glad to convey to you the greetings of the People of Niger. We are happy to be here among you today in this beautiful and prestigious university, the name of which has been associated for a whole century to the vitality and the inventive genius of the People of Mississippi in their systematic endeavors for the achievement of their economic and social well-being.

We are glad to be hosts to this Great Institution, this fortress of the scientific and technical conquests that have gradually given impetus to your State, to your region, to your Nation, and beyond the seas to many other peoples of the world.

Mr. President, when I received your invitation I felt the honor that you wanted to make to my Country and to my People through my person. Allow me to tell you how much we appreciate it and how grateful and honored we feel for this high distinction you are going to bestow upon us. This gesture is an expression of a genuine sympathy and of the great interest with which you are following the efforts made by our People in its strife for its well-being and prosperity or, even more, in its search for self-sufficiency in food. In this regard your invitation

carries hopes and promises for the strengthening of the relations between Niger and the United States of America, between the People of Niger and the Great American Nation.

Obviously, by essence and by vocation, a university is not only a center for the dissemination of Knowledge, of Thoughts and Creation. It is also a melting pot where fertile sediments from other civilizations converge and mix, and it is through this double function of multidimensional transfers that a university reaches to universality and make science and technology a common heritage of mankind.

Africa must have access to Science and Technology. It must also master laws and techniques. It is a prerequisite if we are to avoid superficial development relying on an economy that is precarious because it is turned to the outside world.

As you know, Mr. President, honorable Professors, Ladies and Gentlemen, the African Continent, being very proud to be the cradle of great civilizations, has in many regards the most tragic records for economic and social development. Africa is afflicted by obstacles of all kinds that it must overcome to achieve its future development.

However, historians teach us that it is in Africa that we are more likely to see the great waves of Peoples, techniques, and ideas take shape, disappear, reappear again until a time when all the useful lands become saturated. This testimony confirms the significant role and the historic dimension of the contribution of Africa in the development of economic activities by man, and especially its contribution to agriculture in the world.

In this respect, it goes without saying that the process of diversification, as well as the successive developments in agricultural

techniques, depend on the environment which is constantly changing. But these are not the only factors that come into play. Agricultural and pastoral genesis have always been a fact of culture and civilization. Even before the advent of agriculture, man in his constant migrations has always taken with him his tools, his technology, but also his perception and rational interpretation of the environment. Always, he has taken with him his way of managing and developing his space. He took with him a series of behaviors and attitudes obviously due to his relationship with nature; but also these behaviors in nature could always be adopted to new, real, or apparent requirements that the prevailing economic system may impose on him.

It is therefore admitted that until recent times the millenary balance between man and nature had always been maintained in Africa. Why is this balance so tragically disrupted today?

I will not dwell on the various influences that affected the development of agriculture in Africa. They are the result of different factors. First there are natural factors, the unquestionable climatic changes and consecutive mutation of the ecology. There are also man-induced factors such as the migration from one continent to another that sometimes have created upheavals in the demographic balance of Africa and sometimes imposed new types of land development in which cash crops were given priority over food crops.

But all this is history and Africa could have reestablished its balance if our countries had been able in the wake of their independence to devise a method of development in which man would reconcile with agricultural environment. The destructive action of man is one of the deteriorating factors of the African eco-systems that should, however,

be valuable if the quality of agricultural production is to be achieved. And it is with bitterness that we recognize that following the independence of African countries, the African elite was more interested in politics than in urgent attempts to reorganize the rural sector. A sector which admittedly is of vital importance in any self-relied development process. Obviously, Africa will either be built from the rural sector or will altogether not be built.

Our Countries have been independent for a quarter of a century now and you know that our present concern is the serious reappearance of drought over quite a few regions in this vast Continent. The result of this is the reoccurrence of famine in many countries, especially the countries of the Sahel region and those of the Horn of Africa and Eastern Africa. Thousands of Africans are starving today because of inability to produce the minimum required for survival. According to FAO, Africa needs about 4 million tons of grain to survive in dignity while the global transfers of grains have never been more than 2 million tons. Does that mean that half of this population is going to die?

Allow me to insist on this painful situation, to determine what causes and factors come into play. Then I'll talk about the approach of self-reliance which is the commitment of Africa as a whole to meet the challenge of malnutrition. The case of Sahel is illustrative of the extent of this commitment.

First the causes: Population growth is obviously at the basis of the world food problem. Over the past two decades there has been an unprecedented population boom in Africa as well as in the world. According to statistics, it's took 130 years, after the year 1800, for the world population to increase by an extra billion. It took another

30 years to grow to 3 billion and then a mere 15 years to rise to 4 billion. The developing countries, especially in Africa, account for six over any seven additional people on earth. With this population growth, the food needs in Africa have more than quadrupled between 1950 and 1980. At the same time, the average food production rate increased by only 1.5 to 2 percent per year, which was not high enough to match the population growth.

However, 80% of the work force in Africa is working in the rural sector. So how can we explain the fact that from one year to another the gap keeps widening between population growth and food production? This paradoxical situation can be explained by two things: the wave of drought experienced by the Sahelian area from 1967 to 1968 onwards has produced fragile soil of a lowered fertility.

The need to extend the arable lands led to the development of areas where the ecology is fragile. Overgrazing has accelerated the erosion and the desertification process, and the tropical vegetable cover has deteriorated considerably.

At the same time, in the coastal countries there was a boom of the timber industry. In 1980 the agricultural lands and forests produced twice as much as they did twenty years before. Inevitably, this over-exploitation creates considerable damage to the environment to such an extent that even the areas that are traditionally humid are being affected by drought cycles in recent years.

The consecutive deterioration of the lands has substantially stepped up the drift of the populations to labor intensive areas, to urban areas, and places where industrial or public equipment works are undertaken. This phenomenon, in turn, aggravated the gap between the requirements and the food availabilities to meet such requirements.

But I insist that the food issue in Africa is the result of inadequate development strategies that do not shoot to the specific realities of our Societies. How can we design a genuine development motto that harmoniously associates the various factors, that gives initiative and free action to inventive spirit of our population while giving them more responsibility in the management of their business? How can we devise a strategy for rural development that takes into account contingent rainfall and gives all nations the possibilities to reach self-sufficiency in food? Africa must answer all these questions. It has firmly committed itself to finding the reply during the FAO conference in July 1984 in Harare. Africa vowed to make rural and agricultural development its primary concern. It has vowed to give the highest priority to food production in the framework of national plans, budgets, and projects.

These objectives will be strictly pursued through national concerned strategies, if need be through collective strategies, in the context of intergovernmental institutions. It is in line with this commitment that the CILSS countries, the Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, has set up a four fold operational strategy:

- 1) The farmer or stock raiser of the Sahel must have his responsibilities restored to him as a principal agent of national development;
- 2) A new form of management of the rural areas must be experimented in order to promote a new balance between population growth and environmental and agroclimatic requirements;
- 3) To extend irrigated agricultural programs without neglecting rainfed farming that regularly suffers from climatic hazards. With

1 million acres irrigated, it will be possible to increase annual production from 6 to 7 million tons, which is more than needed to cover the overall deficit of the continent;

4) To introduce structural adjustment policies on national economies.

But naturally the implementation of such a strategy requires technical and financial means that are presently lacking in our countries. Initiatives are underway for the creation of mechanisms relying on solidarity. If they succeed, Africa would have the means necessary for this salutary struggle.

Among these initiatives there is first the Special Development Fund for Sub-Saharan Africa. We are confident that the spirit of dialogue will prevail and that the last obstacles will be removed to allow this fund to be established.

Also, there is the Relief Fund for Drought-hit Countries. The principle of such a fund has been earmarked by the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa during its last summit.

Finally, there is the Sahel Fund that has been proposed in the Niamey Appeal. This is to be an agreement between the Sahel and the international community as a whole to make programmable resources available for self-relied development in agriculture.

My visit to the United States of America and my presence in Mississippi today give me an opportunity to launch an urgent appeal to the international community so that reason should prevail and that solidarity among human beings should be more active than ever to inspire north-south relations. Arms race alone only costs the world six thousand billion dollars, which is, as they say, approximately

\$1 million

every

minute.

What a painful reality at a time when the noose is getting tighter and tighter around the neck of the developing countries, the noose of poverty, starvation, illiteracy and epidemics!

Relying on its own experience and the lessons learned during a long period of lonely strife, Niger has firmly decided to definitively escape from the grip of need.

But I would, first of all, like to recall some basic characteristics of the specific situation of Niger that have an impact on any possible development. We are, against our will, among the LDC's, the least developed countries. We are also among the land-locked countries that have to pay for access to the seas. Our country stands on the strip of Africa that stretches over Sahel and Sahara desert, a region whose ecological balance is constantly deteriorating. Our economy relies essentially on the primary sector. To give more details, I would say that our grain deficit for 1984 is 350 thousand tons. Regarding the cattle, which is one of the pillars of our economy, it has suffered considerably. It has suffered losses owing to the total absence of grass in the areas that are traditionally known as major grasslands.

The tragedy of the drought is combined with the evil effects of the international recession. It is said that it affects all countries of the world, even though it is recognized that the most hit are the third world countries. In various places social upheavals, as sudden as a fit of fever come up, because some people or some communities refuse to suffer this constant anxiety. Man stays man. Living conditions instead of depriving him of his dignity and identity, must contribute to the fulfillment of his personality.

In Niger, our traditions, our customs, and our philosophy contributes to a communitarian life style. But the constraints of modern life require that we go beyond that stage to seek a balanced social environment within a solidarity constantly watching. To succeed in this development, we need to design a strategy that rejects the uniqueness of the social structures where our philosophy of life lies.

If the people is to be mobilized and have greater awareness to face History from the right angle, then we have very few alternatives. Our development objectives, the environmental constraints, the fluctuations inherent to the relations among nations impose on us an approach that inevitably leads to a well-organized developed society. Over the past decade we have been designing and setting up the foundations of new institutions that would better meet our concerns of development and social peace.

Today, these institutions are reality. From the village to the tribe, from the district to the community groups, in each of the administrative divisions up to the national level, development councils have been established. They are familiar with all the problems of their area. Thus, these institutions have cooperative structures. This is the formula by which the rural world is organized in Niger. It is framework of the future for social and economic activities, the appropriate concept for the development of both individual and collective potentials and ingenuity. The process of the establishment of the cooperative structures has just been completed by transferring to the farmers responsibilities that were until then in the hands of state bodies.

This means that from now onwards, a process by which farmers will supervise their own work will be established and will develop all over our country. Rural development will entirely be based on village structures organized in this manner to which the state will provide a minimum institutional support in order to ensure the transfer of responsibilities to farmers.

Therefore, our development society is the need of a people determined to stamp out its destiny. Action is its philosophy and man its final goal. In other words, it is a contract based on trust of confidence between the citizen and the community. It is a society in which man works and achieves; a society where women participate without abandoning their fundamental role of wives, of mothers taking care of their children's education. It is a society where the youth are worshipped; a society that seeks to increase the commitment of the youth to the virtues of effort and initiative, one that would make the youth more sensitive to their sense of duty, honor, and dignity.

Mr. President, this is the new strategy, the battle horse that Niger has chosen in order to meet the today challenges and face tomorrow uncertainties.

In this exciting great endeavor, our People have some formidable advantages. Continuous adversity has endowed them with extraordinary reserves of courage, tenacity and an ever-renewed hope. They also have the benefit of their deep friendships with the other nations of the world. The Great American Nation is one of these. Niger is honored by this friendship and by the special goodwill with which it is expressed.

To finish, I would like to express my hope at seeing cooperation between Niger and the U.S. reinforced at the level of our universities. My visit to Mississippi State University, the esteem and confidence with which I have been honored give me every reason for hope.

I thank you

RESPONSE

Dr. James D. McComas

to

President Kountché's Address

Dear Mr. President:

I think I express the feeling of the students, faculty, and friends of this institution when I say how deeply impressed we were by the eloquence of your remarks.

We were especially grateful for having the opportunity to hear first hand from such a distinguished and experienced African leader the problems as well as the prospects facing Africa today. Given the mission of our University, I was particularly interested in your thoughts concerning the prospects for Africa's economic development generally, and your country's emphasis on programs to increase food production. Certainly, the entire world shares your concern with the devastating drought that is sweeping the Sahelian region and other parts of Africa and that is imposing such extreme hardships on the people of Niger and other nations of Africa. Of course, we applaud the willingness of the nations of the world, including the United States, to cooperate in the provision of emergency food aid, and we commend your own accomplishments as President of the CILSS (a regional organization of Sahelian states) in coordinating the efforts in your region to combat the drought and its effects on your people.

I think that your wisdom and leadership are most evident, however, in the priority you have given to long term agricultural development in

Agreement of Cooperation

Niger. Only through such efforts can we insulate the people of the world from the devastating effects of periodic droughts. Mississippi State University has a longstanding productive association with various segments of the Republic of Niger. Our seed technology program has been involved in your nation's efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in food. But we need to go further on this road of cooperation. We stand ready to work with the farmers of Niger in any way we can to help them improve their food production. We hope to share the results of our research in the production of orghum, millet and other food crops. Our animal scientists can assist in the improvement of livestock production. And our fisheries experts are anxious to assist in your efforts to exploit the resources of the Niger River. In so doing, we too will benefit from the improved quality and adaptability of the techniques we have developed and, generally, in the expansion of human knowledge in areas that improve the living standards of humankind.

Beyond technical cooperation, I would propose that our University join forces with the University of Niamey in establishing a mutually beneficial exchange program involving business, education, engineering, and the liberal arts. Scholars from the University of Niamey and Mississippi State University should engage in joint research projects. They should join forces in the development of teaching curricula and teacher training programs. Our universities share many of the same educational goals, and most certainly we would both benefit from an on-going exchange of ideas.

Your visit to Mississippi State University, Mr. President, has provided us with the inspiration to explore in new educational direc-

tions, and for that we are deeply grateful. We hope that you will consider Mississippi State University as your alma mater and that we will have the pleasure and privilege to welcome you often to our campus.

In recognition of President Kountche's significant contribution to his nation, to Africa and to the world, Mississippi State University is honored to bestow upon his Excellency the title of Honorary Professor of Agronomy.

Agreement of Cooperation

Between

Mississippi State University and the University of Niamey

In consideration of the long and productive association of Mississippi State University with various officials and private entities of the Republic of Niger, the contracting parties: Mississippi State University (M.S.U.) and the University of Niamey (U.N.) declare their intention to make every possible effort to establish a close and beneficial working relationship between the two universities and thereby further their educational and research goals.

Subject to the availability of funds, the cooperation of the two institutions of higher learning will include, but not be limited to the following activities:

1. Establishment of an exchange program involving faculties in the fields of agriculture, business, education, arts and sciences, and engineering.
2. Organization and implementation of research projects of interest to scientists of both universities.
3. Exchange and training of students and sharing study program materials.
4. Cooperation with other institutions in the Republic of Niger and the United States of America to broaden the research base and teaching curricula used in the course of the activities stipulated by this Cooperation Agreement.

It is the belief of the contracting parties that cooperation in such mutually beneficial programs will enhance the teaching and research of the faculties of both institutions and will serve the needs and interests of their students. The contracting parties are convinced also that this cooperation will result in friendships among faculty and students.

This Agreement of Cooperation will have an initial duration of three (3) years and will be extended automatically for three (3) additional years unless M.S.U. or U.N. advises the other parties of its desire to terminate the agreement. Such termination would not affect the conclusion of specific teaching, training, and/or research programs already begun.

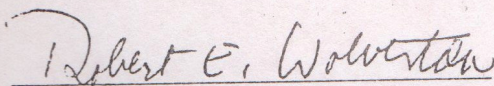
This Agreement of Cooperation becomes effective on the date of signing.

In testimony of this Agreement, the contracting parties will sign the French and English texts of the Agreement of Cooperation which are equally valid.

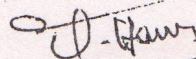
In witness hereof, the contracting parties hereto, have caused these presents to be executed this The 13 day of December 1984.

Mississippi State University

University of Niamey



Vice President Robert E. Wolverton



Dean Abdou Hamani

Date

Date